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Standards of accommodation for air travel

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/272 B, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on standards of accommodation for air travel.

In response to the request by the General Assembly, and pursuant to the internal review of existing policies and procedures announced by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all" (A/72/492), a review of the Secretariat's current travel policy was conducted with a view to leveraging Umoja technologies and ensuring further simplification and streamlining.

To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of travel management in the Secretariat, the Secretary-General proposes: (a) simplifying the determination of the standards of accommodation for air travel; (b) ending the interim measure relating to home leave lump-sum travel to incentivize greater use of the cost-effective lump-sum option; and (c) eliminating the policy of providing for the first-class travel of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General when they represent the Secretary-General.

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations standards of accommodation for air travel are governed by a series of General Assembly resolutions and decisions, including resolutions 42/214, 45/248 A, 53/214, 63/268, 65/268, 67/254 A, 69/274 A and 71/272 B and decisions 44/442, 46/450 and 57/589. The Under-Secretary-General for Management promulgated the administrative instruction on official travel (ST/AI/2013/3, ST/AI/2013/3/Amend.1 and ST/AI/2013/3/Amend.2) for the purpose of implementing the various provisions of resolution 67/254 A relating to the standards of accommodation for air travel.

2. In response to the previous report of the Secretary-General on the standards of accommodation for air travel (A/71/741 and A/71/741/Corr.1), the General Assembly, in section VI of its resolution 71/272 B, requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on standards of accommodation for air travel for consideration by the Assembly at the first part of its resumed seventy-second session.[1]

3. In response to the request of the General Assembly, and pursuant to the internal review of existing policies and procedures announced by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all" (A/72/492), a review of the Secretariat's current travel policy was conducted with a view to leveraging Umoja technologies and ensuring further simplification and streamlining. Accordingly, the present report includes a number of proposals to further rationalize and improve the existing Secretariat travel policy.

4. The experience gained since the issuance of the above-mentioned administrative instruction in 2013 has shown that the processes for determining the standards of accommodation for air travel and the most economical routing of flight itineraries are complex and not compatible with technical developments in the travel industry such as the move towards increased automation, including through the use of online booking tools.

5. It has also become evident that the interim changes made to the lump-sum option for a staff member's home leave travel, as set out in the administrative instruction, have resulted in a reduced rate of acceptance of that option and a corresponding increase in the number of requests made to the Secretariat for the purchase of tickets for such travel. Since the lump-sum option is more cost-effective for the Organization than the ticket option (which includes the total cost of the ticket, terminal expenses and shipment costs) alternatively available to staff, those changes have had a negative impact on total travel costs.

6. In order to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of travel management in the Secretariat, the Secretary-General therefore proposes: (a) a revised method for determining the standards of accommodation; (b) ending the interim measure relating to home leave lump-sum travel to incentivize greater use of the cost-effective lump-sum option; and (c) eliminating the policy of providing for the first-class travel of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General when they represent the Secretary-General.

[1] In keeping with the biennial submission cycle for reports of the Secretary-General on this topic, it is anticipated that the next report will be submitted for consideration by the Assembly at the first part of its resumed seventy-third session and will include biennial information on air travel activities, including details regarding the exceptions to the standards of accommodation, which typically form part of these reports.

II. Comprehensive information on air travel activities and the effects of the implementation of Umoja in travel administration

7. In his previous report (A/71/741), the Secretary-General presented to the General Assembly updated information on air travel activities as requested in section IV, paragraph 10, of its resolution 69/274 A, and comprehensive information on the effects of the implementation of Umoja in travel administration. The report also included updated information, trends and analysis in all areas relating to air travel in the United Nations, as requested in section IV, paragraph 14, of the resolution.

8. The provision of comprehensive information was made possible by, and was based on, data from the Umoja travel module that had been extracted through the business intelligence module and reflected the types and categories of travel as defined in Umoja.

9. For the purposes and the context of the present report, an interim update is presented below for the period from July 2016 to June 2017. The statistics presented also provide necessary context for the Secretary-General's proposals set out below aimed at further rationalizing and improving existing Secretariat travel policy.

10. At this stage, all travel across the Secretariat is processed through the Umoja travel module with the exception of the travel of personnel other than internationally recruited staff serving in peacekeeping missions (e.g., locally recruited staff, uniformed personnel, United Nations Volunteers and individual contractors), which will be included following the next planned expansion of the Umoja travel solution, in early 2018.

11. The Secretariat is making a transition from the static reporting of travel statistics to the active utilization of travel data to further improve travel processes and increase accountability. Examples include the performance analysis of subprocesses relating to travel to identify procedural bottlenecks, and the introduction of dashboards that make key travel management performance indicators more accessible to end users by translating travel data into a readily consumable management tool and presenting it in a visually enhanced manner (see the figure below for an example of the types of travel data that are available in the dashboard format). The latter initiative further supports the Secretary-General's objective of facilitating transparent and timely business intelligence reporting, monitoring and quality assurance for strengthened accountability. Further details are provided in the section below on the advance purchase policy directive.

Screenshot of an example of the types of travel data available in the dashboard format

Travel volume, frequency and purpose

12. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of trips by commercial aircraft purchased by the United Nations, by Umoja travel category, for the period from July 2016 to June 2017.

Table 1
Travel volume by Umoja travel category

Umoja travel category[a]	*Number of trips*	*Percentage*
Official travel	88 987	90
Entitlement travel	1 925	2
Human resources travel	5 281	5
Uniformed personnel travel[b]	2 304	2
Total	**98 488**	**100**

[a] See annex XIX to A/71/741 for a breakdown of travel types within each travel category. Note that the travel category previously referred to as "group travel" has been renamed "uniformed personnel travel" in Umoja.

[b] Refers to the travel of uniformed personnel administered by the former United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and the former United Nations Mission in Colombia. Those were the only two field missions that processed the travel of uniformed personnel in Umoja during the period indicated.

Class of air travel

13. Table 2 provides an overview of the number of trips by commercial aircraft purchased by the United Nations, by standard of accommodation, for the period from July 2016 to June 2017.

Table 2
Travel volume by standard of accommodation

Standard of accommodation	*Number of trips*	*Percentage*
Economy class	82 592	84
Business class	12 776	13
First class	51	<1
Multiple classes of service	3 069	3
Total	**98 488**	**100**

Travel cost

14. A breakdown of travel cost by Umoja travel category for the period from July 2016 to June 2017 is presented in table 3. The figures provided include all modes of travel, including non-commercial aircraft such as United Nations aircraft, train, motor vehicle, etc. The figures are extracted from the financial module, which does not contain data on modes of travel, which would allow for the isolation of trips by commercial aircraft.

Table 3
Travel cost by Umoja travel category
(Thousands of United States dollars)

	Total		
Travel category	*Ticket*	*Other*	*Total*
Official travel	123 756	143 216	266 973
Entitlement travel	3 273	30 975	34 248
Human resources travel	12 081	2 908	14 989
Uniformed personnel travel	2 562	316	2 878
Total	**141 673**	**177 428**	**319 101**

15. Costs are broken down into "ticket" costs and "other" costs. The "other" category includes all non-ticket expenses, such as daily subsistence allowance and terminal expenses.

Advance purchase policy performance

16. The Secretariat continues to monitor trends in the travel industry with regard to the advance purchase of tickets and maintains the view, consistent with the industry, that in general the advance purchase of airline tickets yields savings for the Organization. While it is acknowledged that the efficacy of an advance purchase policy varies according to route, market and standard of accommodation, an analysis of travel data for 2016 carried out at Headquarters showed that savings had been maximized when tickets had been purchased 14 to 20 days in advance of departure. The Secretariat's advance purchase policy states that travel arrangements "should be finalized 16 calendar days in advance of commencement of official travel".

17. The Secretariat has recently taken various steps to improve the advance purchase of tickets. First, a business intelligence report has been made available to all departments, offices and field missions, enabling them to monitor and analyse policy performance. In addition to overall advance purchase statistics, the report

includes details on the submission performance of travellers and travel administrators (measured against the 21-day submission target) and on the processing times of approvers in the travel process (measured against the 5-day approval target), with approvers being human resources partners (for human resources and entitlement travel), travel and shipment approvers (certifying officers) and travel-processing offices.

18. With the insights provided by this business intelligence reporting, departments, offices and field missions are able to identify bottlenecks in the travel administration process and take targeted steps, as necessary, to further improve the advance purchase of tickets. This is yet another good example of the leveraging by the Secretariat of Umoja capabilities to improve policy performance. As a next step, the business intelligence is being converted into an online dashboard that provides an improved, visually illustrative presentation of advance purchase statistics for end users.

19. The advance purchase of tickets is increasingly being added as a key performance indicator in departmental performance reporting. In the past at Headquarters, it was part of the performance reporting of the Travel and Transportation Section, but not of individual departments, although departments have the greatest impact on this indicator. It is expected that the increased departmental awareness resulting from the addition of the indicator will lead to an increase in the number of tickets purchased in a timely manner.

20. Table 4 provides an overview of the number of trips by commercial aircraft purchased by the United Nations, by travel category, and advance ticket purchase performance for the period from July 2016 to June 2017 across the Secretariat. The table also indicates the average number of days in advance that the trips were submitted for approval, as well as the average number of days taken to approve the trips.

Table 4
Advance purchase policy performance, by travel category

			Average time (in days)[a]			
Travel category	*Number of trips*	*Performance (percentage)*	*Submission*	*Human resources partner*	*Travel and shipment approver*	*Travel-processing office*
Official travel	88 978	32	15.8	N/A	2.2	1.9
Entitlement travel	1 925	43	32.9	7.2	2.9	4.1
Human resources travel	5 281	26	17.5	3.9	2.0	3.2
Uniformed personnel travel	2 304	14	16.6	N/A	1.0	3.7
Total (weighted average)	**98 488**	**31**	**16.2**	**N/A**	**2.2**	**2.0**

Abbreviation: N/A, not applicable.

[a] All average times presented in the overall "total" row are weighted in consideration of the relative number of trips made in each travel category. Weighted averages are used to account for the large variance in the travel volumes associated with each travel category and the difference in workflow steps for entitlement and human resources travel (i.e., the inclusion of a human resources partner approval step).

21. The overall performance for the period was 31 per cent. The steps taken to improve the internal approval process, including the above-mentioned report and targets, have proved to be positive: the average travel request is now approved within the five-day approval target.

22. The greatest potential for the further improvement of performance lies in the earlier submission of travel requests by the traveller/travel administrator. The target

for submission is 21 days in advance of the trip start date, yet travel requests were submitted only 16.2 days in advance on average. Better planning at the departmental level remains key to achieving significant improvements.

23. To allow for a comparison of the advance ticket purchase performance achieved in the Secretariat with the performance of other organizations, reference is made to annex XXIII to the previous report of the Secretary-General, which sets out industry benchmarks from organizations belonging to the Inter-Agency Travel Network. While it is acknowledged that the emergency response nature of many departments, offices and field missions of the Secretariat necessitates travel on short notice, the insights gained from the new business intelligence report and other advanced data analysis have given the Secretariat the tools to strengthen advance ticket purchase performance.

Use of alternative methods for mandate implementation

24. The General Assembly, in its resolution 69/274 A, requested the Secretary-General to hold managers accountable for the judicious use of travel resources, in particular by encouraging the use of alternative methods of communication and representation.

25. Table 5 provides an overview of the number of videoconferences organized by the Broadcast and Conference Support Section at Headquarters over the past five years.

Table 5
Use of videoconferencing by the Broadcast and Conference Support Section at Headquarters
(Number of videoconferences)

2012	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*
1 318	2 507	4 963	4 219	4 645

26. Table 6 provides an overview of the number of meetings held using un.webex.com and Unite Communications at Headquarters and offices away from Headquarters over the past five years.

Table 6
Use of alternative methods for holding meetings
(Number of meetings)

2012	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*
1 773	2 659	3 019	6 011	9 485

27. The use of alternative methods increased significantly over the five-year period: the use of videoconferences more than tripled, and the use of WebEx meetings increased more than fivefold. Other technologies, such as instant messaging (e.g., Skype), are also widely used. It is expected that this growth will continue, with new technology being implemented (e.g., Skype for Business and Jabber) and staff becoming increasingly familiar with these technologies and their benefits.

III. Summary of standards of accommodation, and challenges to the processing of United Nations travel

28. In its resolution 67/254 A, the General Assembly decided that, for official travellers below the level of Assistant Secretary-General, the standard of accommodation for air travel would be business class if a single-leg journey was 9

hours or more and would be business class for a multi-leg journey if the combined travel time of the journey was 11 hours or more, including a maximum of 2 hours of connection time, provided that the journey to the next destination resumed within 12 hours. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to modify his administrative instructions on standards of accommodation for air travel so that the duration of a journey would be determined on the basis of the most economical route available, provided that the total additional time of the whole journey did not exceed the most direct route by four hours. In addition, the Assembly endorsed, subject to the provisions of the resolution, the conclusions and recommendations contained in the reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on proposals for more effective and efficient utilization of resources for air travel (A/66/739) and on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/67/636), which included establishing economy class as the standard of accommodation for air travel for consultants and individual contractors, unless determined otherwise by the Secretary-General taking into account the circumstances of the traveller (e.g., health reasons and the interests of the Organization). In this regard, the Under-Secretary-General for Management promulgated the administrative instruction on official travel (ST/AI/2013/3, ST/AI/2013/3/Amend.1 and ST/AI/2013/3/Amend.2), which incorporated the decisions of the Assembly.

29. Table 7 provides a high-level summary of the standards of accommodation in place for the various types of United Nations travellers/categories of United Nations travel.

Table 7
Summary of standards of accommodation applicable to types of United Nations travellers/categories of United Nations travel

Traveller type	*Traveller subtype*	*Travel category*	*Standard of accommodation*	*Notes*
Staff	Deputy Secretary-General (and eligible family members)	All	First class	
	Under-Secretary-General, Assistant Secretary-General (and eligible family members)	All	Business class	When representing the Secretary-General: first class
	Below Assistant Secretary-General level (and eligible family members)	– All official business (except travel for training, medical and security evacuations)	Economy class, if under 9 hours (direct)/11 hours (indirect);	
		– Human resources travel (e.g., appointment, assignment, separation, etc.)	Business class, if above those thresholds	
		– Official business travel for training, medical and security evacuations	Economy class	

Traveller type	*Traveller subtype*	*Travel category*	*Standard of accommodation*	*Notes*
		— Entitlement travel (e.g., home leave, family visit)		
Secretary-General (and eligible family members)		All	First class	
President of the General Assembly		All	First class	
Other authorized United Nations travellers who are not staff members	All[a]	All	Economy class	

[a] Standard of accommodation for the air travel of members of organs and/or subsidiary organs, committees, councils and commissions of the United Nations shall be based on the provisions of Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/107/Rev.6, or as superseded.

30. Economy class remains the predominant standard of accommodation for air travel purchased by the United Nations. As shown in table 2, business class represented only 13 per cent of the total volume of travel by commercial aircraft for the period from July 2016 to June 2017.

Challenges in applying the current travel policy

31. Two important elements of travel policy are the determination of the appropriate standard of accommodation and the determination of the most economical route.

32. In order to determine the appropriate standard of accommodation, the travel unit and/or travel agency must manually factor many elements into the calculation. These include traveller category, grade level, specific provisions that may apply, travel type and purpose, and flight times.

33. In order to determine the most economical route, one must then determine the total duration of travel by the most direct route and the total duration of travel by available alternatives, and limit the list of alternatives to those that have a total duration of up to four hours longer than the most direct route.

34. Over the four years since the implementation of the new travel policy, experience has shown that the determination of the standard of accommodation and the most economical option is very labour-intensive and creates operational implementation challenges, including the inability to further automate the process (i.e., through the use of online booking tools), owing to the following requirements:

(a) The dual threshold (9/11 hours) for determining the standard of accommodation;

(b) The maximum of two hours of connection time;

(c) The provision that the total additional time of the whole journey should not exceed the most direct route by four hours.

35. Those provisions are not supported by airline ticketing systems or online booking tools. Thus, it is not possible to utilize readily available flight data from global distribution systems for the determination of the appropriate standard of

accommodation; instead, it is necessary to make manual adjustments to such data in order to book trips in compliance with the current travel policy.

36. This affects the Secretariat in two ways. First, it negatively affects the efficiency of the overall travel process, since manual calculations need to be made by travel units and by the contracted travel agencies. Second, it prevents further automation of United Nations travel processes, including the use of, and integration with, the online booking tools used in the travel industry.

37. Another practical implication of the provision allowing for a total of four hours of additional travel time is the fact that, for certain "city pairs",[2] in particular those involving a relatively short flight time, the four-hour window can result in a more than doubling of the total travel time. With respect to the third-most-selected city pair for staff below the Assistant Secretary-General level, which is Geneva to Brussels, the most direct round-trip options on Brussels Airlines or EasyJet have a duration of 2 hours and 30 minutes. However, the indirect option on Swiss International Air Lines with a stopover in Zurich has a total duration of 6 hours and 20 minutes and is considered compliant with policy, if less costly, but would result in a considerable loss of a staff member's productivity and time.

Online booking tools

38. As noted above, the complexity inherent in the United Nations travel policy prevents the further automation of travel processes, which also hinders more widespread use of online booking tools. Increasing the adoption of online booking tools would not only lead to improved process efficiency, but also increase client satisfaction, as they provide the convenience of a self-service solution and empower travellers by enabling them to manage their own travel.

39. In order to provide the General Assembly with a comprehensive update regarding online booking tools, the Secretariat collected information on such tools from the Inter-Agency Travel Network and the Travel Services Benchmarking Network in September 2017.[3]

40. In recent years, online booking tools have become the standard in the travel industry. In response to a request for information from the Inter-Agency Travel Network, information was obtained from a total of 19 organizations. Of those organizations, seven

[2] In commercial aviation, a "city pair" is defined as a pair of departure (origin) and arrival (destination) airports on a flight itinerary.

[3] The Secretariat continues to monitor best practices in all areas of travel, including through participation in two travel management networks: the Inter-Agency Travel Network and the Travel Services Benchmarking Network. The Inter-Agency Travel Network is a technical working group composed of travel managers from 75 international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Criminal Court, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Labour Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the International Criminal Police Organization, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Bank and the United Nations Secretariat. The Travel Services Benchmarking Network is an industry group composed of travel managers from 15 organizations (almost exclusively from the private sector), namely, ABB, Allstate, Boeing, Dell, Johnson and Johnson, Merck, Microsoft, RELX, Siemens, United Technologies Corporation, Dow, Honeywell, Rio Tinto, the World Bank and the United Nations Secretariat.

(40 per cent) now have online booking tools in place. Many of those seven organizations recently introduced the tools in question. On average, these organizations process more than half of all trips through the online booking tool platform.

41. Typically, the private sector is an earlier adopter of new technologies than the public sector. The same is true in the case of online booking tools. The level of their adoption is thus higher among the private-sector organizations that belong to the Travel Services Benchmarking Network, with all 15 of them (100 per cent) having implemented online booking tools. In addition, the average uptake of online booking tools is much higher among those organizations, with more than 90 per cent of eligible trips booked through the online platform.

42. As noted above, the benefits of online booking tools include an improved traveller experience and a more efficient and timely approval process. The tools can also be configured to display only those flights that comply with policy, so that travellers can immediately see, and select, policy-compliant flights during the creation of the travel request. In addition, approvers are assured that the most economical option has been selected, which reduces the need to manually determine this. A faster and more efficient approval process would also have a positive impact in terms of adherence to the advance purchase policy.

43. Currently, online booking tools cannot be programmed to implement all aspects of the United Nations travel policy, owing to its many complexities and to the manual adjustments that must be made to flight data. The Travel and Transportation Section has worked closely with leading providers of online booking tools to determine which aspects of the current travel policy can be supported by such tools and which aspects the tools are not able to support.

44. As previously noted, online booking tools cannot be programmed to implement the current, dual threshold for the standard of accommodation (they can be programmed to implement only a single threshold), the maximum two-hour connection time (they can process either the actual flight time(s) plus the actual stopover time(s), or the actual flight time(s) only, without taking stopover time(s) into account) or the four-hour total additional travel time provision (they can process only the most direct or the most economical option, without taking into account any additional factors, such as how the additional travel time of the most economical option compares with the most direct option).

45. In time, it is expected that online booking tools can be closely integrated with the Umoja travel module, which would yield further efficiencies. An integrated online booking tool would streamline the approval process and more closely align the United Nations travel process with the process used by many entities, in which, after approval by management, a travel request is submitted directly to the travel agency for provision of the ticket in line with the entity's travel policy. Such a change would enable travel-processing offices to focus on more value-added tasks such as complex travel/multi-destination arrangements, the performance management of travel agency contracts, the negotiation of airline discount agreements, the provision of reporting and analysis on travel topics, and the provision of training and support to travellers, travel administrators, human resources partners and travel and shipment approvers (certifying officers) across the Secretariat.

46. The prerequisite for a more efficient travel process, facilitated by greater use of online booking tools, is the simplification of the current travel policy.

IV. Proposals to improve United Nations travel policy

47. The Secretary-General presents the following proposals to simplify and streamline the current travel policy.

48. The proposals concern:

(a) Simplifying the determination of the standards of accommodation;

(b) Ending the interim measure relating to home leave lump-sum travel to incentivize greater use of the lump-sum option;

(c) Eliminating the policy allowing for the first-class travel of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General when they represent the Secretary-General.

Simplify the determination of the standards of accommodation

49. As noted above, determining the appropriate standard of accommodation for any traveller is a complex exercise and limits the possibilities for the streamlining and automation of the process. Accordingly, the Secretary-General proposes simplifying the determination of the standards of accommodation by replacing the current, dual-threshold model with a single-threshold, total-travel-time model.

50. It should be noted that this proposal would affect only those travellers and travel categories/types that are currently subject to the dual threshold. The determination of the standards of accommodation for other travel categories/travel types, such as entitlement travel for staff below the level of Assistant Secretary-General (i.e., economy-class travel), would remain unchanged.

51. The single-threshold concept would replace the dual threshold of 9 hours (direct flights)/11 hours (indirect flights). Participants in any missions requiring a travel time below the single threshold (direct or indirect flights) would travel in economy class; participants in any missions requiring a travel time above the single threshold (direct or indirect flights) would travel in business class.

52. The concept of travel time would also be changed from that reflected in the current policy. It would be based on "total travel time", which would consist of actual flight time and actual stopover time (without the maximum two-hour connection time specified in current policy).

53. The single-threshold, total-travel-time model would be significantly less complicated to implement, since manual adjustments to readily available flight data would no longer be required, thus allowing for much faster and accurate processing of travel requests. In fact, the proposed model would enable the Secretariat to further streamline the process and automate the selection of flights through an online booking tool, thus enabling the Organization to more fully utilize current technology and benefit from the resulting efficiencies.

54. In determining the duration (in hours) of the single threshold of total travel time to be adopted, the General Assembly may be guided by the assessment regarding the United Nations standard of accommodation provided by the Secretary-General in his previous report. In this regard, responses from a total of 13 organizations belonging to the Inter-Agency Travel Network indicated that the average threshold for public sector organizations for business-class travel was 6.4 hours of travel time, with the minimum being 3 hours and the maximum 9 hours. The responses received from organizations belonging to the Travel Services Benchmarking Network indicated that the organizations had a similar threshold for business-class travel: the average was 6.8 hours of travel time, with the minimum being 5 hours and the maximum 12 hours.

End the interim measure relating to home leave lump-sum travel to incentivize greater use of the lump-sum option

55. In its resolution 67/254 A, the General Assembly decided that the Secretary-General should, as an interim measure pending the outcome of the review to be concluded in 2015, revise the provision for determining the travel-related lump-sum payment from 75 per cent to 70 per cent of the least restrictive economy-class fare, and requested the Secretary-General to perform an analysis of the impact of the implementation of the provision and to make further proposals on modifying the lump-sum scheme.

56. As detailed in his previous report, the Secretary-General provided an initial analysis demonstrating that, on average, the use of the lump-sum option represented a cost reduction of 21 per cent per traveller compared with the total costs of the ticket option (in which the organization covers the cost of the ticket, terminal expenses and shipment costs) alternatively available to staff, as shown in table 8.

Table 8
Analysis of the lump-sum option versus the ticket option

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	Lump sum paid	*Total costs of ticket option (ticket, terminal expenses and shipment costs)*	*Difference between lump-sum option and ticket option*
Average per traveller	2 019	2 560	(541)

57. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in paragraph 23 of its report on standards of accommodation for air travel of 23 February 2015 (A/69/787), made the recommendation, endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/274 A, that wider use by staff of the lump-sum option be encouraged. The preliminary analysis contained in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (A/71/741 and A/71/741/Corr.1) showed that the rate of acceptance of the lump-sum payment option had decreased from the previously reported 93 per cent to 74 per cent since the implementation of the interim measure. The remaining 26 per cent of staff had opted for the provision of tickets and related benefits, which is a costlier option for the Organization.

58. This decreasing trend can be attributed to two main factors: (a) the reduction, under the lump-sum option, from the previous 75 per cent to 70 per cent of the least restrictive economy-class fare, which has reduced the attractiveness of the option from a financial perspective; and (b) the removal of compensation for travel days under the lump-sum option. The loss of compensation for travel days is often cited by staff who opt for the ticket option as the main reason for doing so. In fact, the provision of a lump sum, regardless of the percentage at which it is set, is understood to compensate for the financial costs of the home leave entitlement, including airline ticket, terminal expenses, excess baggage and shipment, which would otherwise be paid directly by the Organization, but does not compensate for the loss of travel time, which is now experienced by staff members who have chosen the lump-sum option in exercising that entitlement. That is the reason that this change in the lump-sum provision has made the lump sum option less attractive to many.

59. A lump-sum option for the home leave entitlement, which is a benefit throughout the common system, is established by each organization. Therefore, it is important that the United Nations ensure harmonization of the implementation of benefits and allowances set by the International Civil Service Commission. In this regard, the interim measure currently implemented by the Secretariat is less favourable than the lump-sum options offered by many other international organizations.

60. A final analysis and related proposals on modifying the lump-sum scheme will be submitted to the General Assembly at the first part of its resumed seventy-third session. Until that time, the Secretary-General proposes that the interim measure implemented pursuant to resolution 67/254 A be ended, in order to further incentivize lump-sum acceptance and reduce costs for the Organization.

Eliminate the policy allowing for the first-class travel of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General when they represent the Secretary-General

61. Under the current travel policy, Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General designated to represent the Secretary-General on ceremonial occasions or to undertake missions in the exercise of the good offices of the Secretary-General under the Charter of the United Nations or resolutions of the General Assembly or the Security Council may, with the Secretary-General's approval, be provided with first-class travel accommodation, irrespective of the duration of the flight involved. Having concluded the review of all travel policies, the Secretary-General proposes that, when Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General undertake official travel to represent the Secretary-General, the standard of accommodation utilized be the standard applicable to Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General (the class immediately below first class) without any exception.

62. Consistent with the Secretary-General's reform initiative, this recommendation would further simplify and support automation in the processing of travel for this category of traveller by removing the consideration of a trip's purpose, thereby effectively establishing only one standard of accommodation for Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General (the class immediately below first class).

V. Conclusion

63. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/254 A, the current administrative instruction on official travel was promulgated in 2013. In the light of the experience gained since, it has become apparent that the processes for determining the standards of accommodation and the most economical option for air travel are less than optimal and not fully supportive of technical developments in the travel industry, such as the use of online booking tools.

64. On the basis of those lessons learned, and in the context of his recent report entitled "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all" (A/72/492), the Secretary-General makes the following proposals to further simplify and improve the existing Secretariat travel policy: (a) a revised model for the determination of the standard of accommodation based on a single-threshold, total-travel-time model; (b) ending the interim measure relating to home leave lump-sum travel to incentivize greater use of a cost-effective lump-sum option; and (c) eliminating the policy allowing for the first-class travel of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General when they represent the Secretary-General.

65. **The General Assembly is requested to endorse the following proposals to improve the United Nations travel policy:**

(a) **Adopt a single-threshold, total-travel-time model for the determination of a traveller's standard of accommodation for air travel;**

(b) **End the interim measure relating to home leave lump-sum travel to incentivize greater use of the lump-sum option;**

(c) **Eliminate the policy allowing for the first-class travel of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General when they represent the Secretary-General.**